

From The DASAF Engaged Leadership at Every Echelon

We're losing Soldiers to needless accidents throughout our Army. I believe in every instance, there is an individual that could make a difference and change the conditions leading to an accident. How do we know when to intercede and achieve success in protecting our force? How will we know in what manner to interject our commitment to never leave a fallen comrade? The answer is through transformation.

Transformation! It is a word you've heard parlayed back and forth over the last four years. Have you ever given any thought to what it means outside of changes in our formations? As a professional Soldier charged with leading our Nation's sons and daughters, it's worth taking a minute to discuss how we, as leaders, can best embrace transformation.

Transformation is a triad involving leaders, forces, and institutions and is paramount to achieving the Army Vision. As you well know, our Army is executing the largest reorganization of our forces since World War II. The goal is to provide combat commanders a campaign-quality Army with joint and expeditionary capabilities while maintaining the quality of the all-volunteer force.

I propose to you that transformation is far more than an equipment change. I further contend that transformation is more than buying bigger, smarter, faster tools and toys for Soldiers to employ to defeat a threat. While the changes in our forces and institutions are significant in scope and breadth, they pale when compared to the positive impacts leaders can achieve.

We are realigning our forces across our formations to place key elements of our combat power in the hands of Brigade Combat Team commanders. While this gives us a more adaptable and flexible force, how can leaders likewise transform to increase their flexibility and effectiveness? How can we use the culture changes at the heart of transformation to get us there? The truth is, while the changes in our cultural thinking have us on solid footing for a successful future, we still have miles to go.

In our not too distant past, safety was considered the sixth paragraph of a five-paragraph operations order. Safety professionals were seen as the ever-present "safety police" in our formations, ensuring we all embraced the correct way of doing things. Do you remember those days? Do those stereotypes still seem in the past?

Reading our Preliminary Loss Reports, it becomes painfully obvious we need further transformation in the thinking of our leaders. Let me provide several PLR examples. As we look at these, let's "peel the onion" and examine how an engaged leader could have saved the life of a Soldier.

PLR 07-013: A Soldier was killed in a single-vehicle crash on Nov. 4, 2006, at 0250 local. The 22-year-old PFC was driving a pickup truck with a fellow Soldier, traveling at high rate of speed. The PFC lost control of the vehicle, ran off the road and rolled several times before coming to stop in a ditch. The PFC was not wearing a seat belt and during the accident sequence was thrown from the vehicle and fatally injured. The passenger, who was wearing a seat belt, was treated and released.

What can we learn? Did this PFC know that trucks don't handle like sports cars? Did the PFC know that turning the steering wheel at a high rate of speed could send his vehicle out of control? Who knew the 22-year-old would be driving at 0250 hours? Why did the passenger display a semblance of good judgment by buckling-up, but not encourage his/her comrade to

do the same?

Aren't we all leaders? In our organization, when two privates are together one of them is in-charge and serves as the leader. Do we have the guts to engage and lead? What about a culture change that says, "When we see something wrong, we make the appropriate corrections?" A transformed Army is one that is self-synchronizing and always looking and examining to make changes that will improve its capabilities. A transformed Army is one where every member is a contributing piece, helping to improve the effectiveness of whole force.

Here's another PLR!

PLR 07-007: Two Soldiers were killed on Oct. 14, 2006, at approximately 2205 local in a pedestrian accident. The 21-year-old PFC and 22-year-old SPC were attending a private bar-beque near a railroad station. They had been consuming alcohol and, later in the evening, wandered too close to the train tracks. The driver of an approaching train sounded a warning signal and tried to brake, but both Soldiers were struck and killed.

Is the buddy system really an opportunity to provide an additional force protection measure, or simply the chance to have an eyewitness or another Soldier involved in the accident? When is a comrade a fallen comrade? The statistics we have show us that a teammate is a fallen comrade in far more situations than being wounded in combat. Fallen comrades encompass those who are tired, intoxicated, medically impaired, sexually assaulted, depressed or who, for other reasons, are at a heightened risk.

As leaders, we must continue the Army's transformation, including how we deal with our Soldiers to take full advantage of all that each and every one brings to the fight—and the fight is not just in OIF or OEF. We are losing Soldiers every 36 hours in combat, but when we take a holistic view of our fatalities—combat and non-combat—we find a Soldier dies every 9 hours. Where is the greatest risk?

We save lives through "Engaged Leadership at Every Echelon." So, I challenge each of you to "get engaged" and make a difference.

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